



# Sino-Saudi Relations: Geopolitics, Energy, Taiwan, and Chinese Muslims

Chunjuan Nancy Wei and Hamad Alsaeed

College of Public & International Affairs  
University of Bridgeport, Bridgeport, CT

## Abstract

Cradle of Islam and home to two holy mosques, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia bears political significance to China and spiritual importance to its Muslim population. Yet the Kingdom was one of a few major countries that chose to recognize Taipei until the twilight of the Cold War. Being the last Arab state to recognize the People's Republic of China, Saudi Arabia represents a rare diplomatic case worthy of study. The Saudi's strong and stable ties first with Taiwan—even decades after the latter was thrown out of the United Nations—and warming relationship with Beijing now have all to do with oil, but oil is by no means the only factor. The links tying Taiwan to the Saudi Kingdom were complex, geopolitics and anti-communist ideology among them. While the professed anticommunism bound Taiwan with Riyadh in the past, Saudi Arabia holding hands with the second largest economy no doubt shapes a new path for the world not limited in the energy sector. Both G20 members, Sino-Saudi bilateral political-military cooperation is also on the rise. The Saudi 2030 Vision and China's One Belt One Road initiative may further cement the bond. Yet the obvious improvement of the Sino-Iranian relationship and Chinese support of the Syrian regime could negatively affect the Sino-Saudi rapport. This paper investigates the intricate relationships between the world's largest oil exporter and the world's most populous state, revealing the multi-level considerations of bilateral diplomacy. It also looks into the impact this relationship has on their allies and rivals.

## Outline

- Introduction: History as Prologue.
- The Republic of China-The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Relations (1939-1980)
- The Shift of the Relationships (1980s-1990s).
- PRC-KSA relations 1990-2011.
- PRC-KSA relations 2011-Present.

## Sino-Saudi Early Relation:

The diplomatic relationship between KSA and ROC was established in the year of 1947 when both governments agreed to sign a friendship treaty. The new relationship between KSA and ROC opened a very important door for the both governments to improve their countries. KSA ensured to ROC the needed oil, while ROC played a significant role in improving the infrastructure of the Kingdom.

## The Shift of the Relation:

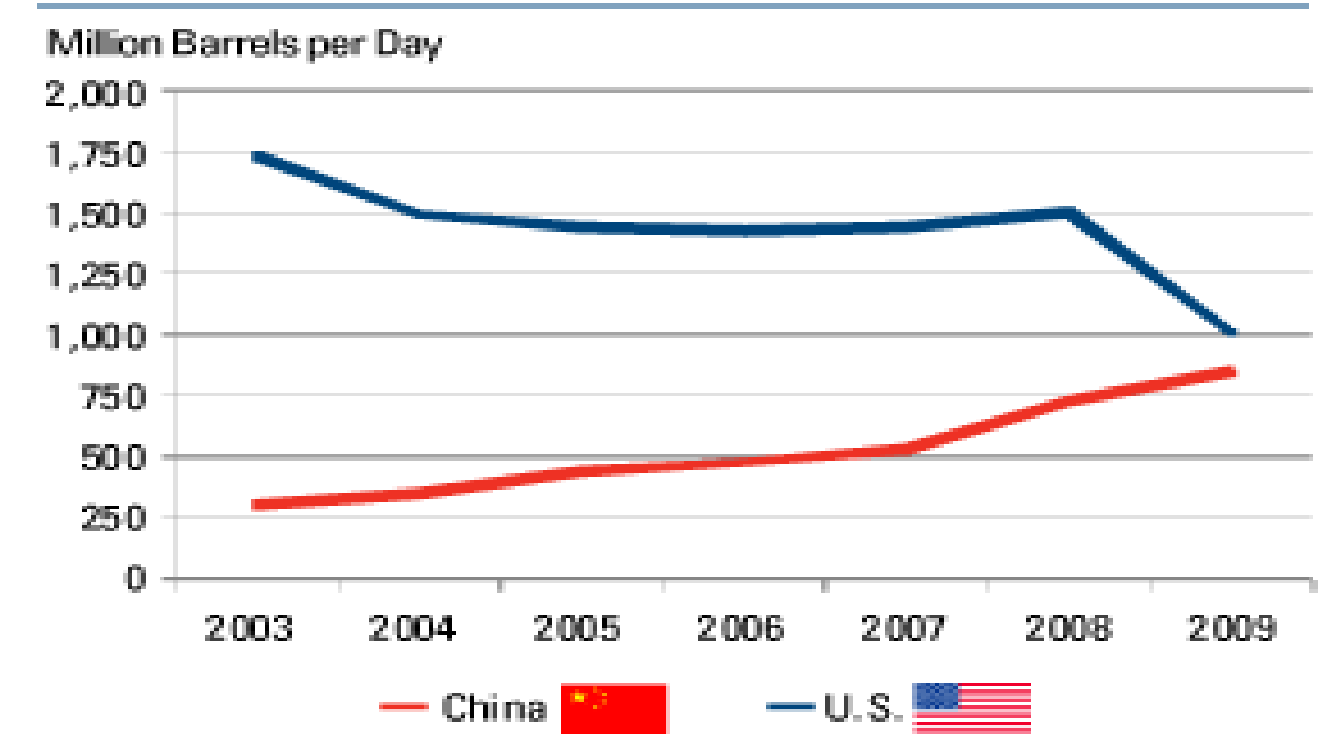
Although ROC lost its control over the mainland China in 1949 and followed by the lost of its seat in the United Nations Security Council in 1971, KSA chose to maintain its relationship with ROC. However, this recognition was ended in 1990 when KSA decided to recognize the PRC as the official government of China.

## The Reasons Behind the Shift:

1. The rise of the economic and political importance of the PRC.
2. Both governments were against the Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.
3. Both governments opposed Israel invasion of Lebanon in 1981.
4. The PRC sold intermediate-range ballistic missiles to KSA in late 1980s.

## The flourish of Sino-Saudi Relations

Saudi Crude Exports to China and U.S.



The decline of the US-Saudi Arabian relations in the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century strengthened the Sino-Saudi economic ties.



The two governments starts exchanging many peaceful high official visits. In the last a few years, the bilateral trade value between these two countries has dramatically increased. The Saudi government could access the Chinese oil field by winning many oil refinery upgrading contracts, while China became the manger infrastructure developer in the Kingdom.

## Barriers to further improvement in Sino-Saudi Relations:

1. The differences in the political positions between the KSA and PRC about the Syrian crisis.
2. The close Sino-Iranian political and economic ties.

## Conclusion

This research explains the path of Sino-Saudi relationship starting from the establishment of the official relationship between the two countries in 1947 to the present. The paper focuses on the factors that drive the political and economic behaviors of the both Saudi and Chinese governments toward each other. Unlike many other countries, the relationship between these two countries are not in a clear path due to many factors. The political position of PRC toward Syria and Iran put the Sino-Saudi relation in a great concern. However, the Saudi 2030 Vision may help improving the political and economic ties between the two countries.